



**SuperValu** 

**Tidy Towns**

*Caring for our environment*

**STREETScape  
AND  
PUBLIC PLACES**




**Sustainable Development Goals**

Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals

# Handbook

Brought to you by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht Tugtha chugaibh ag an Roinn Forbartha Tuaithe agus Pobail agus an Gaeltachta



Riailas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# SuperValu

# The SuperValu TidyTowns competition commenced in 1958 and has since become Ireland’s best-known sustainable and environmental initiative. The competition is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, and has been proudly sponsored by SuperValu since 1991.

The competition is independently adjudicated under eight categories, these are;

<b>Community: Your Planning &amp; Involvement</b>	<b>Streetscape &amp; Public Places</b>
<b>Green Spaces &amp; Landscaping</b>	<b>Nature &amp; Biodiversity in your Locality</b>
<b>Sustainability: Doing more with less</b>	<b>Tidiness &amp; Litter Control</b>
<b>Residential Streets &amp; Housing Areas</b>	<b>Approach Roads, Streets &amp; Lanes</b>

This Handbook, which has been prepared with input from the national panel of TidyTowns Adjudicators, is divided into sections, each category is covered individually, however, the entrant is advised not to read each section in isolation from the others. Landscaping has an important role to play in the adjudication of Streetscapes and Public Places, Residential Streets and Housing Areas and Approach Roads, Streets and Lanes, Tidiness and Litter control, likewise will be looked at in a number of categories. We would encourage you therefore to refer to all categories regardless of the project or initiative being undertaken.

Please refer to the General Information section also which contains valuable information for all TidyTowns groups.

In this section, we look at “Streetscape and Public Places” please refer to the scoring sheet to see the marks for this category. The entry form contains the following text to assist the entrant in completing this section of their entry form;

**Buildings:** Conservation and presentation of heritage buildings and quality of shop-fronts will be considered, taking account of the design, sustainability, accessibility, usability and suitability of new structures or civic amenity buildings for all people, regardless of age, size, ability or disability. Please highlight the efforts made to address derelict sites and unoccupied buildings even if unsuccessful. **uniquely referenced on your map and legend using the reference numbers assigned below.**

**Public Spaces:** Consideration will be given to; squares, parks, playground/play spaces, streetscape, paving, landscaping and street furniture mindful of sustainability and access for all. Condition of street lighting, building facade lighting, appropriately designed signage and way-finding relating to streets and place nameplates. Attention will be given to the presentation of parking locations, historical trails, walkways and access points to local amenities or facilities and the general use of the Irish language.

In September 2015, 193 UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “Transforming our World”. The centrepiece of this Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Throughout the entry form, you will see where many of these goals are aligned to the different TidyTowns categories. Please identify, if applicable, under each category where your projects or initiatives aim to address one or more of the sustainable goals.

You will see that the “Streetscape and Public Places” category aligns to goals 3, 11, 14, 15 & 17.





## STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC PLACES

This category focusses on the unique streetscapes and public places in our cities, towns and villages and in order to appreciate this quality it is vital that we get to know them. We must examine and recognise their beauty, individuality, quaintness, perhaps even the oddity that goes to make up their individual charm and the sense of place that they provide. Our towns and villages are centres for living, employment, recreation and entertainment for the local community. Each has its own special character, with streetscapes, public open spaces and building styles, making up this identity. It also has its own history and traditions which add to this unique character. It is this special individual character that we must protect and improve and by our understanding, we can support our towns and villages and ensure their survival and growth.

## What the Adjudicator considers

Elements that influence Architectural Character

1. Public and Private Buildings including Derelict Sites and Buildings
2. Building Materials and Colour
3. Shopfronts & Upper Storeys
4. Graveyards
5. Public Places – the Public Realm
  - Streets
  - Street furniture
  - Paving
  - Monuments, Sculptures and Art Forms
  - Overhead Cables
6. Signage
7. Boundary Treatments

**Note:** TidyTowns groups and volunteers are reminded that their safety and welfare must always take priority. In order to ensure the safety of volunteers, TidyTowns groups are encouraged to seek the advice of An Garda Síochána or any other relevant authority prior to undertaking projects on roads, roadsides and road verges etc.

## ELEMENTS THAT INFLUENCE ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

The architectural character of a town or village is comprised of a range of elements such as the architectural style of its buildings and streetscapes, the pattern of its streets, street furniture, signage and the quality of the craftsmanship all of which makes up the vitality and viability of a place. Historical and heritage buildings are particularly important and in its Development Plan, the Local Authority will, include buildings worthy of protection. There are often small vernacular buildings, which have perhaps some social or historic association, and although they may not be of 'Architectural' merit, they are of local value and make one place different from the next. There may also be significant archaeological sites of interest. All of these elements contribute to the unique architectural character that we respect and want to preserve, maintain and support while encouraging development, which will enhance our town or village. The elements that make up the special character can be identified by a survey of the town or village and it will also assist in prioritising aspects, which may need attention. A survey should record local buildings of importance, including the materials and colours used and their settings, shopfronts, monuments, street furniture, signage, street paving and kerbs that may have historic interest. Further information on completing surveys is available from Heritage/Conservation Officers in the Local Authorities. Local Historical Societies can also provide valuable sources of information.

### Observing design principles will help to retain the architectural character of a town or village. These design principles could include:

- Ensuring that major renovations to existing buildings and new infill buildings should complement\* the architectural character of the area
- Encouraging the continued use, maintenance and improvement of existing buildings

- Promoting the reuse of unoccupied buildings and upper storeys over shops
- Selecting paving materials, paving patterns and street furniture (such as railings, steps, lampposts, benches and monuments) to complement\* existing materials. (Note; \*Complement does not mean to copy slavishly but to reflect in the new build, features which exist in the existing buildings or streetscape – form, style, materials or perhaps colour).

Tidy Towns Groups are encouraged to assess proposed developments of buildings and public spaces in their towns, villages and areas to ensure that they observe and adhere to these design principles.

## PUBLIC AND PRIVATE BUILDINGS, INCLUDING DERELICT SITES AND BUILDINGS

There is generally a variety of public and private buildings in all towns and villages with Churches, Market Houses, Courthouses, Banks, Schools, and Libraries forming the bulk of the 'public' buildings. Many of these functions can be found in historical buildings that are included as Protected Structures in Local Authority Development Plans. The conservation and presentation of these heritage buildings, as well as their railings, steps, gardens, pathways etc. will all be considered by your Adjudicator. Private buildings include townhouses, shops, offices and all other privately owned buildings that make up the remainder of the buildings in the streetscape. Other buildings and structures that are vernacular in style are quite distinctive and add to the character of towns and villages. Vernacular structures were generally built using local materials, designed to reflect local traditions and built showing the workmanship of local craftsmen. They include cottages, farm buildings, forges, granite and limestone kerbs, boundary walls, gate piers, gates, etc.

Ensuring that buildings and shops in towns and villages remain in active and productive use is

a priority for all Local Authorities. This involves retaining all existing retail, commercial and residential uses as well as encouraging additional activities by reusing vacant shops, converting unoccupied warehouses and promoting 'living over the shop' to help populate the centres of our towns and villages. This approach can also help to regenerate neighbourhoods and backland areas. Tidy Towns Groups are encouraged to work with their Local Authorities and local traders/Chambers of Commerce by helping to ensure that our towns and villages achieve a high standard of presentation and continue to be attractive places to live, work and visit.

Neglected and derelict buildings and sites can detract from streetscapes in our towns and villages – particularly if they occur in prominent locations on the main street. Dereliction and urban decay arises from a range of different circumstances and Planning Authorities have the necessary powers to deal with these issues. For example, the Planning Authority can serve a notice on a derelict site or building owner and require them to undertake the necessary remedial works. The Local Authority can also carry out the work itself and recover these costs from the owner. Tidy Towns Groups can assist Local Authorities by notifying them of derelict buildings and vacant sites and requesting that they are added to derelict and vacant registers. If information on building or site ownership is known, it should also be provided to Local Authorities. Temporary solutions to the problem can include the painting the derelict buildings or using hoardings (with painted murals) to screen them. However, works should only be carried out on receipt of written permission from the owner and the Local Authority. It may also be possible to approach the owner and ask permission to paint the building to improve its appearance or to erect hoarding around the building which can be painted with a mural depicting some local history event.

## BUILDING MATERIALS AND COLOUR

This section considers how different building 'types' in our cities, towns and villages should be maintained and presented. For the purposes of this Handbook, there is considered to be 3 types of building that make the most significant contribution to architectural character. The first building type is large Public Buildings (such as Churches, Court Houses, etc.) which tend to be cut stone structures with decorative stone window and door surrounds. The second building type is brick buildings which are generally confined to cities. The third building type is vernacular structures (such as townhouses, cottages and farm buildings) which are constructed in rough stone often with brick window surrounds and in these instances, they were finished in lime render and sometimes whitewashed in lime wash. These vernacular stone-built buildings should continue to have a lime render finish and should not have this render removed as it will lead to water entering the structure and causing damage. The vernacular styles buildings with rendered finishes that dominate Irish towns and villages.

In the case of buildings with natural stone and brick finishes, minimal maintenance is required of these materials as they are both attractive and durable. However, in the case of the rendered vernacular buildings, two maintenance approaches are possible. The first approach involves washing a rendered building façade instead of painting it. This is the cheapest option and it results in a fresh clean building that avoids the need for regular painting (every 2 – 4 years). Some modern renders have a pigment (colour) and these are designed to eliminate the need of painting. The second approach involves painting the render and the use of colour can greatly enhance a complete streetscape, a row of cottages or a terrace of houses particularly if colours are carefully selected. In some towns and villages colour schemes are co-ordinated in order to give an attractive overall appearance with maximum impact.

TidyTowns Groups who are interested in devising a colour scheme are encouraged to work with the architects in their Local Authority who may assist with advice on colour and some may offer a grant towards the cost of the work. A Chamber of Commerce or a Business Association may also provide sponsorship and assistance. When undertaking any painting scheme, advice is likely to be required on issues such as façade colour, architectural features to be highlighted (or hidden), door and window colours, painting of rainwater goods, railings etc. etc. TidyTowns Groups (preferably working in tandem with Local Authorities and local sponsors) can provide incentives to property owners to maintain their buildings by running 'Best Kept Street', 'Best Kept Building', 'Best Kept Shopfront' or 'Best Kept Terrace' competitions. These competitions encourage property owners to co-operate with their neighbours to maintain their properties with friendly rivalry between streets and terraces. An awards ceremony evening, attended by the Local Authority, Politicians, local business and media, being the highlight of the event.

Colour has traditionally been used to good effect on windows, doors, fascias and other building details. Where colour has been used on a complete building façade to create drama and a vibrancy to the streetscape which provides appealing urban environment. The use of colour can greatly enhance a complete streetscape, a row of cottages or a terrace of houses.

Painting a complete building should not be undertaken unless it is intended to continue this process every two/four years. Very often a rendered building façade can be washed instead of painted which is a cheaper option and results in a fresh clean building. Some modern renders have a pigment (colour) and these are designed to eliminate the need of painting.

## SHOPFRONTS AND UPPER STOREYS

Our streetscapes, in the main, consist of terraced buildings with shops on the ground floor and, in the past, accommodation for the shop owners on the upper stories. This mix of uses gave a vibrancy to the centres of our towns while the quality and design of the traditional shopfronts added both distinction and interest to architectural character. Shopfronts come in all shapes and sizes and they range from highly ornate with ornamental features to simple forms with the owner's name in clear bold lettering. Often, the shopfront designs are reflected in the items on sale. Drapery shop windows were elegant and often divided by narrow timber columns, pharmacies often used curved glass at their entrances and had elegant signage and butchers often had decorative tiles or Vitrolite (structural glass). They are frequently a source of pride for their owners and their community and their important contribution to our towns and villages is recognised by their inclusion as Protected Structures in County Development Plans. The preservation of these is vital and ensures that we maintain our links with the past through these examples of built heritage. In the event that a survey is being undertaken of a town or village (by the Local Authority or a TidyTowns Group), it is recommended that shopfronts are included.

The components of the traditional Irish shop front were inspired by classical architecture and they are comprised of cornice (the top section), fascia (where the name is written), pilasters (the vertical pieces that go from the ground to the fascia) and stall riser (the base section under the display window). Many modern shopfronts have favoured extensive glazed sections with an emphasis on signage / branding (and lighting) and a move away from window displays. The reduction in the number of window displays has had an undesirable impact as it has reduced the vibrancy of our towns and villages during working hours and in the evenings. In order to promote the design of high quality contemporary shopfronts, many Local Authorities have produced Shopfront Design

Guidelines. They often require a replacement shopfront to 'respect' the building and original shopfront by limiting signage to ground floor level, placing a nameplate on the fascia over the window displays and selecting colours to differentiate the ground floor from upper floors. Contemporary buildings will have contemporary shopfronts and these interesting and innovative designs result in the use of modern materials and technological advancements. The use of the upper storeys of properties in our city, town and village centres is also promoted and encouraged as it will ensure effective use of our buildings and boost evening activity on the streets. Therefore, the retention of independent street access to upper floor levels when renovating a shopfront is required. It is recommended that Tidy Towns Groups work with their Local Authorities and local traders/Chambers of Commerce to promote high quality shopfronts in order to ensure that town centres remain vibrant, distinctive and attractive.

Shop windows are designed to display goods. Unfortunately, in recent years there has been a trend to attach signage directly to the inside on the glass obliterating any form of window display. This trend has made our streets unpleasant places in which to walk. An active streetscape with a variety of window displays gives vibrancy to a town during working hours and in the evening. This form of signage is unpleasant for the community who wish to keep 'active streets' in their towns and villages

The upper stories of our terraced streetscape must also be used. While shopfronts catch our eye as we meander through our towns the upper floors need to be painted and maintained. Many Local Authorities have tax incentive schemes to owners to renovate their properties so that people can live in the centres of our towns and cities 'over the shop'. The main access to these upper floors is via a door on the front façade of the building located adjacent to the shop with secondary access at the rear often through a garden or yard. This use of the upper floors will ensure evening activity on the town streets. In renovation, a shopfront the retention of this independent street access to upper floor levels is a requirement.

## GRAVEYARDS

Graveyards are an important feature in our rural and urban areas that give an insight into our past. They are dotted throughout Ireland; some in remote areas while others were placed in prominent locations within communities. In addition to the many graveyards associated with varying religious beliefs, famine graveyards are a reminder of darker days in our history. In recent years, Tidy Towns and other community groups have undertaken wonderful work to old graveyards that includes adding identification signs and this has contributed to the historic knowledge of their area. However, it is important to remember that old graveyards are archaeological sites protected by the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014 and written permission must be sought before any work is undertaken in them. Many graveyards are habitats for a rich diversity of nature and wildlife, which must be carefully protected during maintenance, conservation and recording work. The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 states that it is an offence to destroy growing vegetation during certain months. Planning of graveyard work schemes is crucial for all graveyards but in particular ones which are a habitat for wild plants, hedgerow animals and birds. Therefore, maintenance work to graveyards must be carefully planned to ensure that it is carried out in strict compliance with the Guidance provided by the Heritage Council. [https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/guidance\\_care\\_conservation\\_recording\\_historic\\_graveyards\\_2011\\_7mb.pdf](https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/guidance_care_conservation_recording_historic_graveyards_2011_7mb.pdf)

It is recommended that Tidy Towns Groups who would like to undertake maintenance work to their local graveyards should get in contact with their Local Authority and they are often an excellent source of advice, funding and expertise.

Advice is freely given by specialist Government archaeologists to community groups and this should be strictly followed. Very often damage was done in the past as community groups undertook to 'clean-up' their graveyards – ivy incorrectly

removed from structures which resulted in their collapse, fallen grave slabs were straightened, hollows filled in, trees removed which disturbed graves, etc.

In contrast, new cemeteries, particularly lawn cemeteries and those with more formal layouts are managed and maintained as green spaces – they can benefit from tree planting, use of hedges instead of walls for division of space, planting climbers to reduce visual impact of stark walls, minimising use of herbicides, incorporation of seating, landscape treatment of car parks etc.

A mechanical digger should never be used by a community in a graveyard and any work undertaken should make use of hand tools. Certain works however should never be undertaken – uneven ground hollows levelled, earthfast stones removed, ivy pulled from structures including boundary walls, rubbish burnt in the graveyard, or sandblasting of gravestones. Typical improvement works undertaken by community groups include removal of vegetation in an ecological way and then keeping it in check by hand cutting twice a year. Lichen typically grows on old gravestones, which give an interesting characteristic in addition to monitoring air pollution. A minimal hand cleaning of gravestones using water and soft brushes in order to record the information inscribed should only be undertaken.

## **PUBLIC PLACES – THE PUBLIC REALM**

The public realm is all the spaces between buildings in a town or village to which the public has access. It includes streets, footpaths, squares, playgrounds, and parks. It also contains what we call ‘street furniture’ – seats, lampposts, post boxes, advertisements, litterbins, traffic signage, milestones, bollards etc. The quality of the public places makes a very positive contribution to the lives of the community and making these welcoming and accessible to everyone is vital. Public places where pedestrians and cyclists have

priority over vehicular traffic is fundamental to creating ‘a sense of place’ in any community.

Tidy Towns Groups can play a very important part in designing, improving and maintaining public spaces and they are encouraged to approach their Local Authorities with suggestions for enhancements. Why not identify small areas in a town or village area where seats could be positioned, a tree could be planted or a play area could be provided? Creating and enhancing micro public spaces help to support age friendly living and they can add to the biodiversity of an area. Small spaces can help with sustainable drainage while the addition of green and planted spaces has the potential to realise ecological objectives and establish a wildlife corridor. These types of action can make our towns and villages more inclusive environments where people of all abilities can move with ease. It is generally accepted that hard landscapes such as streetscapes benefit from soft landscape treatment. Guidance on the choice of tree, shrub or other plant species and after care can be found in the section entitled ‘Green Spaces and Landscaping’.

The condition of road and pavement surfaces are also important to the visual appearance of an area. Historic paving materials include rounded cobbles, granite or limestone flagstones, cut stone setts and cobble stone drainage channels. Historic paving can be as important in creating a sense of place as the buildings, which surround them as they can foster a sense of pride and admiration in highly visible locations (like public squares) and areas of reduced traffic. Where surveys of architectural character are carried out, any historic paving materials should be included and it is recommended that a photographic record of materials and patterns is taken. These records would enable the reinstatement of the historic paved materials following road or footpath repairs. A photographic record of materials and patterns is very often a useful document when entering into discussion with your Local Authority. Very often the historic pavement is removed when necessary ‘improvements’ are undertaken. Using the original historic paving materials in the new layout is to

be encouraged and the survey undertaken by the community group will be of assistance to the Local Authority in its planning.

The presence of overhead electric (and other) cables is a feature of many of our towns and villages. While it is accepted that the undergrounding of electric cables in a town or village can enhance the visual amenity and attractiveness of a streetscape, it is understood that such projects are costly and beyond the control of Tidy Towns Groups. However, it is recommended that Tidy Towns Groups should work closely with their Local Authorities (and other utility providers) in order to deal with this issue. For example, Tidy Towns Groups should ask their Local Authorities to install the necessary wire ducting when completing path and road repair or resurfacing as this will facilitate a phased undergrounding of the cabling when funding permits. The undergrounding of electric cables in a town significantly enhances the visual amenity and attractiveness of a streetscape and when this is undertaken in our towns and villages, we will have an attractive unimpeded view of the buildings and streetscape.

In recent years Town and Village Renewal schemes have led to areas designated primarily for the pedestrian. This has been achieved by the creation of narrower streets, wider footpaths, enlarged paved areas with outdoor seating used by coffee shops and restaurants and former main street car parking areas redesigned as urban plazas with seats and planting. These schemes are to be encouraged as they bring vitality into the main streets and they have encouraged pedestrian movement, which benefits the retail and commercial sector. The use of paving materials, which are of local origin, are generally used and this is to be commended. Landscape architects who are specialist in selecting appropriate materials are often employed by Local Authorities to undertake this design work. Car parking surface materials have changed over the years. With rolled gravel or hollow pavements now being used instead of impervious tarmac. These porous surfaces enable grass can be grown in central urban areas. Tidy Towns Groups are

encouraged to engage with their Local Authorities to ensure that adequate provision is made for distinctive paving, seating and planting in city, town and village centres.

Monuments to individuals or events form part of our history and tell the story of an area – the method of their display reflecting the importance of the person or event. Commissioning and placing of monuments or pieces of public art should be carefully considered to ensure that an appropriate location is found for them. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in murals on gable walls in our towns. The ongoing maintenance of these should be considered before a community embarks on this form of art. The colour scheme for street furniture such as seats, planting troughs, lamp standards, traffic signage, litter bins and other street furniture must also be carefully considered as these items are subsidiary to the streetscape and should not be painted in bright colours to ‘stand out’. As they are not the main feature of a streetscape, they should only be seen as a backdrop to the form and curve of the streets with their associated buildings.

## SIGNAGE

Signage has a significant influence on the streetscape and public areas of our cities, towns and villages. While there is no doubt that street and directional signage in towns is important unnecessary signage should be removed as it causes clutter and detracts from the streetscape. This is particularly the case with advertising signage that is placed indiscriminately in town and village centres and commercial premises, which display multiple advertising signs. While some advertising may be necessary to attract customers the overwhelming amount of signage in recent years has made our streetscapes chaotic. It is not uncommon to see numerous advertising signs attached to the one premises. One well-designed sign will attract just as many customers and will enhance the retail/commercial property. Tidy Towns groups are encouraged to undertake a survey of

street and directional signage, street poles, and advertising signage in their area to identify signs in poor condition and those, which are obsolete, should be removed to aid in the decluttering of the streetscape.

Street names can tell the history of a town or village. They often indicate an aspect or activity long gone. They can also tell us of historical figures who made an impact on the area and were revered locally and honoured. The old name signs are often works of art that were sometimes chiselled out of stonework. Traditionally street name or signs made from cast iron and erected on the corner buildings. It is recommended that street signage should be included in architectural surveys and should be positioned about 4 metres over ground level. Every effort should be made to ensure that old name signs are retained during redevelopment projects, with redevelopment many of these street signs have disappeared which is unfortunate as they were part of the history of the area. Their reinstatement should be encouraged by TidyTowns groups. A well-designed street sign will add to an area in addition to continuing its historic tale.

## BOUNDARY TREATMENTS

A variety of materials have been used to delineate boundaries between private and public space over the years and these boundary treatments also make a positive contribution to the special character of our cities, towns and villages. Traditionally, the private space between the house and the public road was separated by a high stone wall or a low stone wall with high cast iron railings. Many of these reflect local heritage and craftsmanship and in instances where they remain, intact care should be taken to ensure their conservation. Ivy and other growth should be carefully removed from stone walls (including bridges etc.) as the roots penetrate the joints resulting in the collapse of the structure over time. It is advisable to seek professional advice when proposing to remove ivy from stone walls etc. The delineation of private and public space in new

build areas is often achieved by low walls (of no more than 1M in height) and the public realm is supervised by the occupants of the buildings. In some instances, the boundary treatment is non-existent or consists only of a change of ground treatment – paving to gravel or grass. This is often seen in smaller communities and reflects the historical character of the area.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear that the beauty, individuality, quaintness, and the sense of place found in our many cities, towns and villages all have a wide range of influences. While the strong influence of key elements like their streetscapes, buildings, land uses (retail, residential, etc.) and public spaces is obvious, the contributions that are made by monuments, signage, boundary treatments and paving materials are considered to be very significant to the appearance of our cities, towns and villages and the experience they offer to both and residents and visitors. It is also clear that we all have a role to play in improving our cities, towns and villages requiring careful and proactive management by all stakeholders (such as Local Authorities, Businesses, Residents) and that TidyTowns groups have a strong role to play in this process.



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